

## THE PRICE

movies, plays seemed to exist entirely in the now; characters had either no past or none that could somehow be directing present actions. It was as though the culture had decreed amnesia as the ultimate mark of reality."

"The Price grew out of a need to reconfirm the power of the past," Miller said. "Nineteen sixty-eight, when the play is set, was already nearly forty years since the Great Crash, the onset of the transformed America of the Depression decade. It was then that the people in this play had made the choices whose consequences they had now to confront."

### The Play

The Price is a drama of family betrayal played out by two brothers. The younger brother, Victor Franz, nearing fifty, is a policeman; his older brother Walter is a prosperous research physician. The two have not seen each other in the sixteen years since the funeral of their father. The father had been a millionaire before the 1929 stock market crash. By 1936 he was bankrupt, and, in the midst of the Depression, he became depressed, never to recover. For sixteen years, until his death in 1952, the father went out to work, other than the occasional odd job, presumably supported by the dutiful younger son, a promising student who gave up college to join the force at age 21. The older brother, by then a doctor, contributed only \$5 per month to their keep, knowing that the old man still had \$4,000 invested. Unaware of the father's resources, Victor had asked \$500 from Walter to finish his degree, but the money was not forthcoming.

The brothers meet again when a Manhattan brownstone, where the father lived, is about to be torn down, and its attic, full of family furniture, must be emptied. This is the set. Victor and his wife Esther are met there by an elderly dealer in second-hand furniture, Gregory Solomon. Unexpectedly, Walter joins them. The resentments of twenty-eight years, since Victor quit college, are revealed, while the price of the furniture is negotiated. But the title of the play refers less to the dollar amount finally agreed upon for the family furniture than to Victor's statement to Walter: "There's a price people pay. I've paid it, it's all gone, I haven't got it any more. Just like you paid, didn't you?" Both men have a fear of failure, recalling their father sitting in his chair (placed center stage), immobilized by outer forces and inner weaknesses. In *Death of a Salesman* the middle-aged father faces failure in front of his two sons, who are on the periphery of the action. In *The Price* the father is long dead; his middle-aged sons are

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the protagonists, facing their own lack of success, while haunted by the paralysis that overcame their father. Humor (and the wisdom of Solomon) is provided by the octogenarian furniture dealer, a father figure removed to the realm of fable.

### The Illustrations

The illustrations depict a set for the play. As indicated by the playwright at the beginning of Act One, "The room is progressively seen." The artist Stan Washburn has followed this direction. In eight drawings he scans the setting, an attic piled with furniture, stage left to right, from the perspective of a member of the audience seated just to the right of center, down front. The viewer's position is made apparent by the shifting angles of the floorboards. Seen progressively are the harp, straight-back chairs, lamps, china closet, sewing machine, end tables, desk, upholstered chairs, andirons, clocks, chests of drawers, coat rack, and, finally, the phonograph that plays the laughing record at the beginning and end of the play. Each picture is separate and distinct; the series is contiguous, but with no shared images except for the stage flooring. One of the illustrations is included in this prospectus, as printed on the paper for the book.

### The Author

Arthur Miller was born in 1915 in New York City. He is one of the foremost American playwrights of the twentieth century, whose career began in the 1940s and has continued through the 1990s. A writer with a powerful sense of his historical and social mission, Miller is known for his treatment of the American success myth and the moral legacies of the Depression, World War II, the McCarthy era, the Cold War, and Vietnam. In the role of traveling salesman, Willie Loman, he created the classic embodiment of the male straggler by the American culture of success. Miller's Loman is a dramatic character who has taken on the status of a folk hero. Among Miller's plays are *All My Sons* (1947), *Death of a Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), *A View from the Bridge* (1955), *After the Fall* (1963), *The American Clock* (1980), *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* (1991), and *Broken Glass* (1993). His novels include *Focus* (1945) and *The Misfits* (1960). He is also the author of three books with his wife, the photographer Inge Morath: *In the Country* (1977), and *Chinese Encounters* (1979). His memoir, *Timebends*, was published in 1988.